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ABSTRACT

To determine the extent to which Chinese mass media reflected official policy concerning U.S.-Sino relations during the six year period after the 1979 normalization of relations, a study examined Chinese newspapers and evaluated their treatment of U.S. actions. News stories, editorials, columns, and features in the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service Daily Report (China) were analyzed according to six content categories: (1) Political, (2) Economy, (3) Education, (4) Industry and Business, (5) Science and Technology, and (6) Socio-cultural. The information was also divided into five time periods. The results suggested that media content was linked with the general philosophies and ruling ideologies, as the United States was often portrayed as a friendly nation ready to help with China's modernization projects, particularly during periods I and II. Media treatment of the United States deteriorated during period III, 1981-83, when the legality of selling arms to Taiwan was questioned, and when Chinese tennis star Hu Na was granted asylum in the United States. Renewed relations during period V were also reflected. The general attitudes toward the United States were either positive or neutral 80% of the time, reflecting China's pragmatic attitude toward contact with the United States in modernizing their nation. (JC)

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An Update On Sino-U.S. Relations As Seen Through the Chinese Mass Media

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the Sino-U.S. relations as portrayed by the Chinese mass media since the 1979 Sino-U.S. normalization. News stories, columns, editorials, and features in Foreign Broadcasting Information Service Daily Report (CHINA) were content analyzed. A total of 5,001 articles covering Sino-U.S. relations were coded in the period of 1979-1984. The findings in this study suggests that media content is linked with nation's interest, political system, and ruling ideology

In the arena of international diplomacy, the mass media play an important role as an instrument for the expression and promotion of national perspectives. As Lent stated, international news coverage and usage are often determined by international diplomacy, national government and military policies, and historical-cultural heritage./1

There is also general agreement that the mass media are essential components in the formation of foreign policy./2 Although the government's role may be the center of focus, the mass media seem to hold the initiative and the capacity to set the tone of public voice.

In international diplomacy, the media mirror the ruling ideology. For example, Lunch and Effend showed that The New York Times editorial treatment of India increased favorably as United States relations with India improved./3 Armstrong found that news stories of the important event were always written to serve United States interest./4

There are curious findings in a democratic society in which the private media are free to depart from the official governmental diplomatic line. But in an authoritarianistic system such as China, the attitudes expressed by the media can be expected to serve as a barometer of official diplomatic policies. The media, therefore, play a critical role in determining and in carrying out policy. Thus, we might expect that changes in media coverage of diplomatic issues by the Chinese media would also indicates a hardening or softening of the official governmental line. A trend analysis of media

content over time should also reflect the extent of changes in official policy.

The purpose of this study is to conduct such an analysis over a six year period beginning from 1979. This particular date was selected because Chines-American relations seemed to take a dramatic turn at that time. It was hypothesized that an analysis of the Chinese media should reflect this basic change and any fluctuations in foreign policy, however minute.

In the Sino-U.S. Normalization stage, the Chinese mass media constantly reflect diplomatic considerations. As Pye observes, China's media not only voice official slogans but occasionally act as a forum for advocating policy changes and alternatives./5 Another researcher found that coverage of President Nixon's visit to the People's Republic of China in the early 1970s revealed similar findings./6

For this reason, an analysis of Chinese diplomatic policies would be of importance to diplomatic relationships between that country and the United States. For example, there was substantial coverage of such ceremonial events as exchange of official visits, receptions, and people-to-people friendship after the Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping's official visit to the United States. This pattern was closely demonstrated in the treatment of several major diplomatic events within the last decade. The events included are Vice President Mondale's 1979 trip to the PRC, Vice Premier Geng Biao's 1980 trip to the United States, Premier Zhao Ziyang's 1984 visit to the United States, and President Reagan's trip to the PRC in 1984.

By the end of 1979, the U.S. government decision to grant the Most Favored Nation (MFN) status for the Chinese led to a series of cultural, scientific, and consular, as well as economic accords. This relationship weakened, however, after the United States government approved new arms sales to Taiwan on June 30, 1980. Other conflicts, such as President Reagan's two China policy and the defection of Chinese tennis star Hu Na to the United States damaged the diplomatic relations between two nations.

A new trend began to appear in the Chinese mass media following these events. For example, the official newspaper of the People's Republic of China, The People's Daily, wrote:

> The U.S. media compared Taiwan and the Chinese people of the mainland to a "bird" in hand and "birds" in the bush; and compared China to a "silent dog in the night." The U.S. media think that comparing China and the Chinese people, with whom the U.S. alleged hopes to maintain friendly relations. But these statements have at least revealed the deepseated hostility of certain Americans toward China. . . Since China and the Chinese people have actually refused to acknowledge this imperial "law." Some Americans are disturbed over China criticism of U.S. hegemonist actions; but can this kind of hostility by the U.S. media toward China not be described as a sign of a hegemonist attitude?/7

Another report on Hu Na political asylum wrote:

> The U.S. government's unreasonable decision to grant political asylum to Chinese tennis player is yet another

> act that infringes on China's sovereignty, interferes in its internal affairs and hurts the feelings of the Chinese people. This is a grave political incident long premeditated and deliberately created by the U.S. The Chinese government reiterates that China will never abandon its principled stand of safeguarding its state sovereignty and national dignity. . . From today, the Chinese will stop implementing all the cultural exchange items which have not been carried out in "The Implementing Accord for Cultural Exchange in 1982 and 1983 between the two countries./8

Method

News stories, editorials, columns and features in the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service Daily Report (China) were content analyzed. FBIS (China) was chosen because it covers news stories on Sino-U.S. relations from most major Chinese media./9 A total of 5,001 articles related to Sino-U.S. relation were examined in the six year period since Sino-U.S. Normalization officially took effect January 1, 1979.

To compare media treatment of Sino-United States relations, the study was divided into five periods by using major political trends and events (Table 1). And each story was assigned to one of the six content categories adopted by Kristiansen and et al./10 The **Political** category includes all stories that deal with a) U.S. policy toward China (and vise versa), b) Sino-U.S. agreements in politic, and c) ceremonial events such as exchange of Sino-U.S. official (or non-official) visit. The **economy** category includes a) cooperative agreements in trade, b) U.S. economic policy toward China (and vise versa), and

c) receptions by economic delegation. Other four categories included in this study are: **education**, **industry & business**, **science & technology**, and **socio-cultural**.

For a comparative analysis of the coverage of Sino-U.S. relations in the five periods, assertion analysis was used./11 A story was coded as positive if it had one or more positive assertions about Sino-U.S. relations and no negative assertions. A story was negative if it had one or more negative assertions and no positive assertions. A story was neutral if it had positive and negative assertions, or neither positive nor negative assertions.

A reliability test of 1,800 randomly selected articles was conducted by the authors and a communication major student. Intercoder reliability for the subject category was 93.8%./12

Table 1 About Here

Results

The total number of articles in each category was **Political**, 2,634; **Economic**, 717; **Education**, 275; **Industry & Business**, 550; **Science & Technology**, 210; and **Socio-Cultural**, 615. Overall, the Chinese media focused much of its attention to the Sino-U.S. political relations during the six periods (1979-1984) covered, averaging roughly 53% respectively.

Table 2 About Here

Table 2 indicates that the Chinese media differed significantly during the five periods covered in this study (Chi Square =183.14, df=20, p<.0001). In general, the Chinese media turned more attention to Sino-U.S. relations during the first period when Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations were normalized. As seen in Table 2, **Political** relations were the foremost concerned, followed by **Socio-Cultural, Economic, Education, Industry & Business, Science & Technology** during the normalization period **(Period I)**. This pattern was not stable in the Period II, when PRC adamantly opposed any return to official U.S.-Taiwan relations, as well as the sale of a sophisticated fighter plane to Taiwan. When a 19-year-old Chinese tennis star, Hu Na, asked for political asylum in the United States, **Socio-Cultural** and **Education** relations between two countries decreased drastically. This can be attributed to the fact that PRC cancelled all official cultural and sports ties with the United States when Hu Na was granted political asylum.

More interestingly, as shown in Table 2, the diplomatic tie in period III seems to be consistent since the normalization of diplomatic ties in 1979. It was true that all Chinese media turned more attention to the Sino-U.S. political relations which then became the major concern of the Chinese media coverage of Reagan's China policy after Reagan succeeded Jimmy Carter as President.

With respect to attention, coverage of Reagan's China policy in the Chinese media before and after to Reagan's visit to China did not reveal similar patterns. As seen in Table 2, the Chinese media paid more attention to Sino-U.S. political relations before Reagan's visit to China rather than after Reagan's visit. However, the key thrust of both Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang's trip to the United States and President Reagan's return trip to China in Period V was the recognition by both leaders that agreement to expand trade and other economic and socio-cultural exchange. It is apparent that the two trips set the stage for a marked upturn in the relationship. Table 2 explains the trend that more U.S. trade missions visited China and more U.S. cultural and friendship delegation visited China. For their part, the chinese continued to broaden the range of incentives for U.S. investors, including conclusion of a bilateral tax convention with the United States, and indicated their intention to deepen economic ties directly with the U.S.

Table 3 About Here

For the further analysis of the media treatment in the Chinese media, each story was coded into three categories: **Positive**, **Negative**, or **Neutral**. There is also evidence that the Chinese media showed more favorable attitude toward Sino-U.S. relations during the honeymoon periods of Period I and V./13 This was true for **Negative** category. As seen in Table 3, the

Chinese media gave Sino-U.S. relations more negative treatment during the Period III when both countries had the worst relations since the Sino-U.S. normalization of 1979. Such trend can be partly explained by the fact that the Chinese media, before Reagan's inauguration, considered Reagan's 'Two China' policy as harmful to Chinese interests and Sino-U.S. relations. For example, before Reagan's inauguration, Reagan kept advocating that U.S.-Taiwan relations be upgraded from the "unofficial" to "official" level. Even, after his inauguration, the Chinese media blamed Reagan's policy for "Two Chinas Plot," or "U.S. on Dangerous Game."/14 There is also evidence that the negative attitude toward the United States was decreased significantly in the Period V. This is understandable in that Chinese' media attitude toward the United States is directly linked with its perceived conflict of interest with the United States.

Discussion

The findings of this study re-enforce the conclusion of previous studies that media content was linked with the general philosophies and ruling ideologies. As shown in the study, the Chinese media gave high priority to Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations.

The United States was often portrayed as a friendly nation ready to help with China's modernization projects in the Chinese media during the period I and II. This relationship

was intermittently interrupted, however, by some important unresolved matters such as the Taiwan issue. The findings indicate that the Chinese media treatment of Sino-U.S. relations increased favorably as Sino-U.S. relations improved. Throughout the six year period, it should also be noted that negative attitudes pervaded the coverage a maximum of only 20 percent during Period III. Thus, the general attitudes toward the U.S. as expressed in the Chinese media were either positive or neutral 80 percent of the time.

Normalization indicated that the Chinese government developed a pragmatic approach of contacts with the U.S. to modernize its country. This study also showed that the Chinese media gave priority to the reporting of government policies and goals in terms of political relations with the U.S. Future studies of this type should reveal the direction and magnitude of Sino-U.S. relations and could serve as a general indication of health of this relationship.

Footnotes

1. John A. Lent, "Foreign News in America Media," Journal of Communication, 27:46-51 (Winter 1977)

2. Tsan-Kuo Chang, "How Three Elite Papers Covered Reagan China Policy," Journalism Quarterly, 61:429-432 (Summer 1984)

3. Mervin D. Lynch and Atiya Effendi, "Editorial Treatment of India in the New York Times," Journalism Quarterly, 41:430-433 (Fall 1964)

4. Charles Armstrong, "A Content Categorization and Thematic Analysis of News Magazine Coverage of the Tonkin Gulf Incident," Master Thesis, University of Tennessee (1973)

5. Lucian W. Pye, "Communication and Chinese Political Culture," Asian Survey, 18(3): 416-420 (1978)

6. John A. Lent, op. cit.

7. Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (China), "U.S. Media Treatment of China Criticized," B 3 (Feb. 15, 1983)

8. Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (China), "Further on Protest on Hu Na Political Asylum," B 1 (April 7, (1983)

9. Twenty-three Chinese mass media covered by the FBIS were analyzed in this study. They are: Radio Beijing, XINHUA (China News Agency), Renmin Ribao, Gong Ribao, Beijing Ribao, Shijie Zhishi, Guangming Ribao, Yuan Xianiu, China Daily, Jingji Ribao, Ningxia Ribao, Beijing Jingji Daobao, Shijie Jingji Daobao, Guoji Wenti Yanjiu, Yangcheng Wanbao, Banyuetan, Zhongguo Xinwen, Yan Jiu, Beijing Wanbao, Beijing Review, Zhongguo Qingnian, Liaowang, and Guoji Wenti Yanjiu. Other foreign media covered by FBIS are: AFP, Le Monde, and Kyodo.

10. This is the revised subject categories adopted by Kristiansen and et al. Connie M. Kristiansen, Gary Fowlie and Susan J. Spenser, "Britain's Broadcast Coverage of Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," Journalism Quarterly, 59:638-641 (Winter 1982)

11. Klaus Krippendorff, Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980), p. 33.

12. The following reliability formula was used:

$$\% = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$$

where M is the number of coding decisions on which the two judges are in agreement and N1 and N2 refer to the number of coding decisions made by judges 1 and 2, respectively. See Ole R. Holsti, Content Analysis For The Social Sciences And Humanities (Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969) p. 140.

13. The coefficient of correlation was used to see the relations between P I and P IV (Coefficient of correlation = .956, $p < .001$).

14. Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (China), "PRC Protests U.S. 'Two Chinas' Plot Resolution," B 1 (Nov. 25, 1983).

Table 1
A major Sino-U.S. diplomatic events
covered in the Chinese media
(1979 - 1985)

Period I: Normalization (from Jan. 1979 to May 1980)
- Opening Ceremony: PRC Liaison office in U.S.(1/2/79)
- Deng Xiaping's visits U.S. (1/29/79)
- U.S.-PRC business protocol signed (4/3/79)
- U.S.-PRC Science-Technology protocol signed (5/9/79)
- Mondale visits China (8/25/79)
- PRC State Dept. announces Olympic boycott (5/30/80)
- U.S. House discusses 'Most Favorable Nation' extension for China (6/12/80)

Period II: Breakup (from June 1980 to Dec. 1981)
- U.S. approves new arms sales to Taiwan (6/30/80)
- U.S. Defense Dept. announces arms to Taiwan (7/7/80)
- Reagan calls for official U.S.-Taiwan relations (8/18/80)
- PRC makes formal protest over U.S.-Taiwan relations (10/14/80)
- Secretary of State, Alexander Haig visits China (5/14/81)
- U.S. sells jet fighters (FX) to Taiwan (11/12/81)
- PRC warns U.S. not to sell arms to Taiwan (11/19/81)

Period III: Crisis (from Dec. 1981 to March 1983)
- Legality of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan questioned (2/5/82)
- U.S. decides to sell arms spare parts to China (4/14/82)
- PRC denies charges on gaining U.S. technology (7/26/82)
- PRC criticize Reagan's pledge to Taiwan (8/2/82)
- PRC tennis star Hu Na defection (8/4/82)
- U.S. to extend aircraft accord with Taiwan (8/23/82)
- U.S. F-104 jet fighter to Taiwan reporter (3/2/83)

Period IV: Setback (from April 1983 to Dec. 1983)
- PRC calls for improved U.S.-PRC ties (6/2/83)
- Congress urges Reagan to repair U.S.-PRC ties (6/20/83)
- PRC reaffirms participation in 1984 Olympic (6/21/83)
- PRC, U.S. sign textile agreement (8/22/83)
- Secretary of Defense, Weinberger visits China (9/26/83)
- U.S. speeding up technology transfers to PRC (9/28/83)
- White House announces Zhao, Reagan 1984 visits (9/29/83)

Period V: New Era (from Jan. 1984 to Dec. 1984)
- Premier Zhao Ziyang's visit to U.S. (1/9/84)
- Sino-U.S. Scientific Cooperation signed (1/11/84)
- PRC demands U.S. reduce arms sales to Taiwan (3/12/84)
- White House announces Reagan's visit to PRC (3/22/84)
- U.S. production appears on PRC television (4/6/84)
- Sino-U.S. nuclear agreement (4/27/84)
- PRC Olympic team arrives in L.A. (7/17/84)

Table 2

Comparison of Subject-Matter Categories By Periods

	P I (N=1,388)	P II (N=1,324)	P III (N=748)	P IV (N=572)	P V (N=969)
Politics	56.3%	55.6%	55.6%	50.0%	42.8%
Economics	11.7%	13.2%	19.8%	14.8%	15.2%
Education	7.9%	4.5%	2.5%	5.9%	5.5%
Industry & Business	6.3%	11.3%	11.0%	11.4%	17.1%
Science & Technology	5.9%	3.6%	3.6%	3.7%	3.3%
Socio-Culture	11.9%	11.8%	7.5%	14.2%	16.1%

Chi Square = 183.14, df=20, p<0.001

Table 3

Comparison of Content Direction By Periods

	P I (N=1,388)	P II (N=1,324)	P III (N=748)	P IV (N=572)	P V (N=969)
Positive	44.6%	34.1%	16.0%	26.6%	36.7%
Negative	5.7%	12.6%	20.0%	11.9%	7.4%
Neutral	49.7%	53.3%	64.0%	61.5%	55.9%

Chi Square = 260.75, df = 8, $p<0.001$